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ABSTRACT

To broaden the knowledge base of factors related to rapid subsequent births among teenage mothers, subsequently pregnant mothers (N=5), one-time mothers (N=5), and non-pregnant teenagers (N=10), between the ages of 14 and 22, were compared on use of contraceptives, educational goals, and family relationships. All subjects completed a personal information form, the Child-Parent Relationship Scale, and a semantic differential focusing on their perception of the mother figure. Analysis of results showed that 80% of the mothers were not raised in homes with both natural parents, while of the non-mothers 70% were raised with both natural parents and 30% with one natural parent and one stepparent. Of the mothers, 70% were married, but only half used contraceptives regularly and none used them always. Of the mothers, 70% did not attend school or work and had no immediate plans to do so. All of the non-mothers were in school and 80% had specific educational or occupational goals. Adolescents with more than one pregnancy rated their mothers somewhat less positively than did the other groups. (JAC)

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A COMPARISON OF SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF TEENAGE MOTHERS AND TEENAGERS WHO HAVE NO CHILDREN

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A COMPARISON OF SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF TEENAGE MOTHERS AND TEENAGERS WHO HAVE NO CHILDREN

The most recent large-scale survey of teenage sexual behavior by Zelnik and Kantner (1980) has caused great concern because the results provided no consolation or reasons for optimism regarding the future. The findings indicated an increase in premarital adolescent pregnancy since the previous two similar surveys in 1971 and 1976 by the same investigators (Stuart & Wells, 1982). The facts are overwhelming: annually over one million adolescents become pregnant (that is 11 percent of all teenagers in the U. S.); two-thirds choose to give birth (Held, 1981).

Various studies have contributed some more specific findings about the teenage pregnancies. Black teenage females in the U. S. have a fertility rate more than twice as high as their white counterparts: 515 births over the teenage years for every 1,000 black teenage girls compared to 221 for every 1,000 while American teenage girls ("Teenage Black Mothers, " 1983). The average age at which women begin intercourse remains around 16 since 1971 (Stuart & Wells, 1982). No real relationship seems to exist between current age and use of birth control, but a relationship may hold between age at first intercourse and first use of contraception (Rogel & Zuehlke, 1981). The general consensus is that most teenagers who become pregnant do so (not intentionally, but) because of a failure to decide (Rogel & Zuehlke, 1981). A lack of communication between the teenage girl and her partner, or between the girl and her mother is often a causal factor in failure to use birth

control (Stuart & Wells, 1982). The pregnant teens believe their mothers to be most disapproving of the situation and that the father of the baby is the most approving (Held, 1981).

Professional and lay persons alike have difficulty comprehending subsequent unwanted pregnancies among adolescents. Peabody et. al. (1981) indicated that explanations have been speculative; they also referenced Furstenberg (1976) who systematically examined why subsequent pregnancies occurred. He found in his longitudinal analysis of approximately 400 predominantly black adolescents that one-fourth of the adolescent mothers became pregnant within 12 months following the delivery of their first child, and over 40 percent by 24 months. Furstenberg concluded that adolescent mothers generally were unable to regulate their fertility to conform to their desires; adolescent mothers are not necessarily knowledgeable in the use of contraceptives just because they have had one baby, nor are they necessarily overly motivated to use contraceptives because they have had an unplanned pregnancy. Furstenberg found a slight majority of teenage mothers (54 percent) had had a second or third child, and of the unmarried teenage mothers, 63 percent still had only one child five years after the first birth.

Darabi, et. al. (1981) found tht the majority of young women have had one child and no subsequent pregnancies. The same writers found the probabilities of subsequent pregnancy are greater among women who do not return to school and among those who were married teenagers at the time of their first birth. Beyond education and marital status, few clear-cut conclusions can be drawn. No significant differences were

found in the likelihood of rapid subsequent pregnancy due to interest in employment, actual employment, job prestige, welfare status after the first birth or socioeconomic status of the woman's family of origin. The importance of the school-return variable may be that it indicates an ability to plan for the future and to act upon those plans.

Darabi, et. al (1981) noted that 82 percent of a teenage sample reported they were not trying to get pregnant the first time, and that 86 percent reported an unplanned pregnancy the second time around. Thus, the writers concluded that well over a majority of the teens were either not using any contraception, or were using it ineffectively even after they knew they could possibly become pregnant. The puzzling statistic that 55 to 75 percent of the teenagers use no device during intercourse was rationalized as a belief that the younger one is, the more likely she is to think that "bad" things (like pregnancy) won't happen to her (McMahon & McMahon (1982). This is underscored by Steinlauf (1979) who found that contraceptive effectiveness (operationally defined as the number of unplanned pregnancies in a woman's history) was significantly and negatively related to means-ends problem solving ability and a belief in internal control and significantly and positively related to a belief in chance control. The view taken by Steinlauf is that the teenager will deal with contraceptive problems much as she does other "normal" problems with which she is confronted

Birth control, pregnancy, pre-marital intercourse -- all are controversial subjects. Because of the controversy involved and the

confidentiality concerns, researchers find it difficult to study the pregnant adolescent population (Held, 1981). Due to these circumstances the data is often furthered around a medical setting or homes for unwed mothers. Coordination and permission are still hard to obtain under these circumstances.

In a society that frowns on teenage childbearing, attention is often focused on this behavior "the second time around" Darabi, et. al. 1981). The American values may be showing here, but the teenaged pregnant girl does not live in a value-free world (Baumrind, 1982). Another price paid by significant numbers has been feelings of fear, guilt, worry, or embarrassment about having sex: They have found that the deep level of emotional involvement required for sexual activity causes them considerable confusion and "comes too early" (McMahon & McMahon, 1982).

This, preser , study evolved from the local concern of Parenthood and Childbrith Education Services (PACES) which wanted to understand better the subsequent pregnancies, so they could better serve the girls with whom they work. The overall purpose was to broaden the knowledge base of factors related to rapid subsequent births among teenage mothers by focusing on the use of contraceptives, educational goald, and family relationships.

The present study was designed to examine adolescent mothers with the primary focus on the following question: In what ways are the subsequently-pregnant mother different from the non-pregnant teens or the one-time pregnant mothers?

ed on the literature, the null hypothesis for this study is as follows: No significant differences will appear between the non-pregnant teenagers, the one-time pregnant teenagers, and the

subsequently pregnant teenagers in selected personal characteristics, their use of contraceptive/preventive measures, their quality of family life, their educational goals, and their attitudes toward their own mothers.

METHOD

Sample The subjects were: 5 teenage female who have been pregnant one time (Group 1), 5 teenage females who have been subsequently pregnant (Group 2), and 10 teenage female who have never been pregnant (Group 3). The girls who had been pregnant were clients of PACES and the Jonesboro Public Health Department. The not-pregnant girls were white-middle-class teenagers. The subjects were between the ages of 14 and 22.

Procedure Each subject responded to a personal information questionnaire, a quality of family life scale, and a semantic differential scale. These were done anonymously.

Instruments Personal information questionnaires asked primarily for responses on their personal characteristics, their living situations, decisions on sexual behavior, perceptions of how other significant people saw their situation, and their educational goals.

The Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS) (Swanson, 1950) rates the teenager's feelings, happiness, and satisfaction in her relationship with her parents. Higher scores reflect greater dissatisfaction with quality of family life. The instrument may be scored to yield two subscale scores and a total score: (1) reaction to family in

general (SAF), (2) relationship with parents (PAT), and total quality of family life (QFL), the sum of the SAF and PAT scores. The semantic differential scale included 18 dimensions of perception of the mother figure by the teenager.

Analysis Frequency counts were used for items on the questionnaire, e.g., those still in school, the last school grade completed, marital status, birth order, use of contraceptives, and parent attitude rankings. Frequency count was also tabulated for goals and/or future plans. Semantic differential scales were analyzed by one-way analyses of variance as were the scales on the CPRS. $P < .05$ was the level of significance used.

RESULTS

The responses to the personal questionnaire yielded five interesting disclosures:

Of subjects in Groups 1 and 2 (those who had one or more babies), 80 percent were not reared in homes with both natural parents present; 40 percent were reared in single-parent homes. Subjects in Group 3 (those who had no babies), on the other hand, had all been reared in two-parent homes, 70 percent with both natural parents and 30 percent with one natural - one stepparent combination.

The birth order of 60 percent of those subject in Groups 1 and 2 was "middle child"; 40 percent of those in Group 3 were middle children.

Seventy percent of those subjects in Groups 1 and 2 were married, but none indicated they used contraceptives "every time"; 50 percent of Groups 1 and 2 indicated contraceptive use 'most of the time."

In response to the question, "If someone recommended the use of contraceptives, who was it?", no subjects in Groups 1 or 2

marked "father," 20 percent marked "mother," 30 percent marked "father of the child," 10 percent marked "friend," 40 percent marked "nobody"; in response to the same question no subject in Group 3 marked "father," 10 percent marked "mother," 30 percent marked "friend," 30 percent marked "educator/counselor," 20 percent marked "other person," 10 percent marked "nobody."

Seventy percent of subjects in Groups 1 and 2 were not attending school or employed: This same 70 percent indicated no specific educational or occupational plans for the immediate future; 100 percent of subjects in Group 3 were attending school; 80 percent of these indicated specific educational and/or occupational plans for the future.

The data in Table 1 show the semantic differential scale items for which statistically significant differences were found.

Insert Table 1 about here

One-way analyses of variance showed that in most instances where differences occurred, subjects in Group 2 rated their mothers as significantly different from subjects in Groups 1 and 3. In the case, for example, of "Good - Bad," the safe statement would be that subjects in Group 2 rated their mothers as "less good" than did subjects in Groups 1 or 3. Neither group rated "Mother" and "Bad." A similar nature of difference was evident in other items shown in Table 1; neither group rated "Mother" with highly negative connotations.

The CPRS scales yielded no significant differences among groups in their perceptions of the quality of family life.

DISCUSSION

Some findings in this study might have some practical significance. First, a clear difference exists between those who were reared with

both natural parents (no babies) and those who were reared under other circumstances (one or more babies). Having been reared with both natural parents seems to be a distinct advantage. Secondly, having babies/getting pregnant does not seem to encourage continuation of education or the active pursuit of employment. If these activities (education/employment) are indicators of the mothers' decision-making skills, this would suggest that such skills are relatively low and that the teens might profit from training in this area. Thirdly, those who are married do not indicate use of some method of contraception/preventive measure "every time." In general, those who are using some contraceptive method (in any of the three groups) indicate they did not learn contraceptive/preventive measures at home; they indicated having learned it elsewhere, if they learned it at all.

Even though some differences do exist, not significant differences were found among the groups in their perceptions of the quality of family life. Some significant differences were found on the perceptions of their "mothers," but even greater differences had been expected. The teen with babies did not perceive their mothers with negative connotations, only "less good" than did those with no babies. In fact, in only two instances did those with one baby and those with no babies differ in their perception of their mothers.

Due to these marginal differences, conclusions are tenuous. The study of other dimensions of the teenagers with babies and teenagers without babies might disclose more significant points of distinction.

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Teenage black mothers double whites in fertility. (1982, June 30). Jonesboro Sun, p. 2C.

TABLE 1

Semantic Differential Scale Differences

Good - Bad	2 < 1, 3*
Beautiful - Ugly	2 < 1, 3
Considerate - Inconsiderate	2 < 1, 3
Energetic - Indifferent, Not Caring	1, 2 < 3
Important - Unimportant	2 < 1, 3
Sincere - Insincere	2 < 1, 3
Accepting, Understanding - Narrow-minded	2 < 1, 3
Not Self-centered - Self-centered	1, 2 < 3
Truthful - Dishonest	2 < 1, 3

*Group 1 - those with one baby
Group 2 - those with two or more babies
Group 3 - those with no babies